

HIS HONOR

I

JUDGE HOSMER'S study was on the second floor of his home. Not a pretentious room. Calf-bound volumes on the shelves that lined the walls; a comfortable chair under a reading light, a work table on which books, papers, pen and ink were usually littered; and a more formal desk where, in laborious longhand and disdaining the services of a stenographer, the Judge wrought out his opinions. There was a homely honesty about the room; a clean suggestion of common sense and fundamental decency; a certain uprightness. Rooms much used do thus at times reflect the characteristics of those who use them.

The Judge was, this evening, at the desk and writing. He used a stiff, stub pen; and he wrote slowly, forming the large characters with care, forming the pellucid sentences with equal care. He consulted no notes; it was his custom to clarify the issues in any case so thoroughly in his own thoughts that there could be no hesitation when the moment came to set those issues down. Half a dozen sheets, already covered with his large hand, lay at his elbow. His pen was half-way down another when a light knock sounded upon his closed door.

The Judge finished the sentence upon which he was engaged, then lifted his eyes and looked across the room and called:

"Come, Mary."

His wife opened the door and stepped inside. She shut it behind her, and crossed to her husband's chair, and dropped her hand lightly on his head. He lifted his own hand to smooth hers caressingly.

"Almost through?" she asked.

He nodded. "Another line or two."

"Jim Cotterill is down-stairs," she told him.

The Judge seemed faintly surprised. "Jim?" he repeated. And added thoughtfully, half to himself, "Well, now."

"He says there's no hurry," she explained. "Says he just dropped in for a word or two. Just to say howdy."

"That's—neighborly," her husband commented. "Course, I've seen him every day, in court. But I haven't had a chance to talk to him. To ask him how things are, down home."

She nodded, smiling. "Another of your scruples, Bob?"

"It wouldn't hardly have looked right," he agreed. "The other side were doubtful, anyway, knowing I'd been attorney for the Furnace a few years ago, and knowing Jim and me were townsmen."

"I know," she assented.

"Case is finished, now, though," he commented. "Tell Jim I'll be through in fifteen or twenty minutes. You entertain him, Mary."

She made a gesture of impatience. "He makes

me uncomfortable," she said. "I never liked him."

The Judge smiled. "Oh, Jim's all right. He's fat; and he's a little bit slick. But he means all right, I reckon. Give him a cigar and ask after his folks. He'll do the talking for both of you."

She nodded, moving toward the door. "Yes," she assented; and asked: "I haven't bothered you?"

The Judge smiled. "Lord, Honey, you never bother me."

But when the door had closed behind her, his countenance was faintly shadowed. Concern showed in his eyes, dwelt there. He remained for a little time motionless, absorbed in some thought that distressed him. In the end, there was a suggestion of effort in his movements as he picked up his pen and began again his slow and careful writing. Bethany Iron Furnace against John Thomas, David Jones, et al. His decision.

II

It was half an hour later that the Judge came out of his study to the head of the stairs and shouted down them: "Hi, Jim!" Cotterill, a certain impatience increasingly manifest in his eyes, had been talking with Mrs. Hosmer. He answered, and the Judge called to him: "Come along up."

Mrs. Hosmer followed the attorney into the hall and watched him climb the stairs. A short, bald man with a countenance that was always good-natured, but never prepossessing. She saw him grip her husband's hand at the top, panting a little

from the ascent. They turned together toward the Judge's study, and she went back into the living room.

"This is neighborly of you, Jim," Judge Hosmer was saying, as he closed the study door behind them. "Come in and set. Have a stogie. I'm glad you didn't hop back down home without coming to say hello."

Cotterill's rather small eyes whipped toward the older man, then away again. "I didn't figure we ought to get together while the case was going on," he explained. Both men, meticulous and precise in their professional utterances, dropped easily into the more colloquial idiom of their daily life.

"Right enough," Judge Hosmer agreed. "Fair enough. But no harm now. How're tricks, anyhow? Folks well?"

"Yes, well enough. Were when I left. I've been too busy to do much letter writing, since I came up here."

"They have sort of kept you humping, haven't they?" the Judge agreed.

"Well, that's my job," Cotterill told him; and the Judge assented.

"Sure, that's your job."

A little silence fell between these two. The Judge, tall and lean, with bushy brows above his wide-set eyes, studied the fat little man with some curiosity. Cotterill seemed indisposed to speak; and the other asked at last: "Family all well, Jim?"

"Well? Sure. Fine."

"What's the news, anyway?" the Judge in-

sisted. "I haven't heard from the folks lately."

The attorney leaned back in his chair, somewhat more at ease; and he smiled. "Well," he said. "Things go along about the same. Folks down home are right proud of you, Judge."

"Sho," said Hosmer, deprecatingly.

"Yes, they are," Cotterill insisted good-naturedly. "Yes, they are. I was talking to old Tom Hughes, when he sent for me about this case, in the beginning. He told me to give you my regards and good wishes."

"That was neighborly of him."

Cotterill nodded. "Tom's always been proud of you, you know, Bob. Course, being at the head of the Furnace the way he is, he runs a lot of votes in the county; and he's always kind of figured that he elected you. Helped anyway. Feels like he's done something to put you where you are. He liked you, when you were handling their business, too. I guess the Old Man kind of feels like you were his own son."

Hosmer's thin, wide mouth drew into a smile. "A fatherly interest, eh? Tom's a good old man."

"Well, he's not the only one down there that feels that way about you, Bob. You know how the folks there stick together. The men that amount to anything. Tom's bunch. Old Charley Steele, and Dave Evans, and that crowd. They've always been back of you. Sort of feel as though you were one of them."

"Best friends I've got in the world," Hosmer agreed.

Cotterill chuckled. "Matter of fact, it's right funny to see them watch the papers when you're

sitting in one of these big cases up here. Bragging to strangers that you're from there."

"Yeah," Hosmer remarked encouragingly. He watched the fat little lawyer, an ironic question in his eyes.

"They're all getting ready to get behind you and push, when you run again," Cotterill assured him. "Dave Evans said here, just the other day, that you could get pretty near anything you wanted to, if you watched your step. It means a lot to have the home town folks back of you, you know. There's a neat bunch of votes down there, Bob."

"Sure," the Judge agreed.

Cotterill opened his hands with a frank gesture. "Of course, they're all watching this case, right now. It's pretty important to the Furnace, you know. Not much in this one case, but it's a precedent. Reckon it would cut into the business they do down there quite a bit if things went wrong. Tom says to me when we first talked about it: 'You got to win this case, Jim. If you don't, it's going to cost us money.' And what hurts the Furnace hurts the town."

He hesitated; and the Judge said slowly and pleasantly: "You're dodging around corners, Jim. What's on your mind?"

Cotterill swung toward the other, leaning a little forward in his chair. "Well—" he began, then hesitated. "Bob, you know my reputation, I guess?"

"I know your're reputed to be—successful," said the Judge. If there was in his word anything of criticism or of reproach, Cotterill paid no heed.

"I mean, you know, that I've the reputation of going right after what I want. No wabbling around."

"Have you, Jim?"

"And I'm coming right to the point now."

"Come ahead."

The fat little man hitched his chair a little nearer the other's. His voice was lowered. He gesticulated with a pudgy finger.

"First thing," he explained, "I want to be sure you understand just how important this is. To us, and to you, too. It's business with us; but it's a policy with you. That's what I want you to understand. They haven't asked you for anything because they helped you get started; and they don't aim to. Not for what was done for you then. But we can't afford to lose this case now."

Hosmer said slowly: "Case is finished, Jim. Decision is all written. It's in that envelop there." He pointed toward the top of his desk.

Cotterill shot a glance in that direction; and beads of sweat started upon his forehead. "That's all right," he said. "No need of going into that. I know I'm not much as a trial lawyer. I know I fell down on this case. Facts and law were with us; but I didn't get the stuff into the record the way I'd ought to, and some of our witnesses didn't stand up when Marston got after them. Marston's a good lawyer; but there's more to trying a case than the court end of it. I'm trying my case right now, Bob."

The Judge did not reply. He seemed to have settled into a certain stony calm; his eyes were

steady and inscrutable. Cotterill waited for an instant, then swung swiftly on.

"Thing is," he said. "You want to figure whether you're going to stand with us, and have us back of you; or whether you want to stand with this other bunch. They were against you at the start. You know that. And they're not going to shift now, even if you're good to them. They'll just figure you're scared. You're coming up for reelection one of these days. Maybe for a bigger job. And if we're solid back of you, you can have anything you want. You know that, Bob. But if we split, you're a goner. There's the whole thing. You stick with us, and we'll stick with you. You throw us, and we'll—remember it. We're not asking favors for what we have done, but for what we figure to do. See?"

He stopped short, watching the other shrewdly. The Judge at first made no move, said no word. His eyes were thoughtful; and his glance was not turned toward the other man.

"Do you see?" Cotterill repeated.

"I—see what you mean," said the Judge, slowly.

"Then what do you say?" the fat man insisted.

Judge Hosmer swung slowly to face him. There was something judicial in his tones, even and calm; and his colloquialisms were gone.

"I'm not ambitious—in a political way," he replied.

Jim Cotterill watched him, marked the apparent hesitation in his answer; and the fat man licked his lips, and looked behind him toward the door with something furtive in his manner. Then

jerked his chair still nearer to the other, with the buttonholing instinct always so strong in his ilk. And laughed in an unpleasant way.

"All right, Bob," he said. "All right. I get you. We're ready to meet you on that ground, too."

"On what ground?" the Judge asked tonelessly.

Cotterill whisperingly explained. "We know your affairs pretty well, Bob," he said, assuringly. "You've got a reasonable salary; but it's none too much. You like to live comfortable; and nobody blames you. Everybody feels the same way. There are a lot of folks that'd like to be friendly, help you out. If you wanted they should. And there are a lot of ways they could help you. Any way you like."

"What way?" Judge Hosmer insisted.

Cotterill's embarrassed reluctance, if such an emotion can fairly be attributed to the man, passed before the Judge's encouraging inquiry. "There's that mortgage," he suggested. "I know it's a burden to you. It ain't that you need the money. You're paying six per cent. on it, and making more than that on the money it releases for you. Pays any man with a business head to borrow at six per cent. That's all right. But maybe there are times when you fret a little bit about that mortgage. Well, Judge, you don't need to. Easiest thing in the world to have it tore up. All you got to do is say the word."

The Judge did not say the word. Cotterill pursued the subject.

"Maybe there's something else," he suggested. "I take it you're a business man, but I may be

wrong. Maybe you don't know where to get any better than six per cent, for your money. If that's the trouble, we can help you, too. You don't know the market. Not your business to. But there are men that do know it. Fact is, they are the market, Judge. They make it jump over a stick whenever they like. Old Tom is in with them. And they'd be glad to show you the way. You wouldn't have to worry. You just open an account. Put in as much as you like. I can guarantee it'll double and double for you, pretty regular. Handled right. You can call it a speculation; but it's not that. Not when the market is trained, way it is. You see how I mean?"

The Judge said nothing at all; and Cotterill threw out his hands with an insinuating gesture. "Or," he suggested, "it may be you haven't got any loose money to put in. That'll be all right. They'll carry the account for you. Carry it, and take care of it and whenever they make a turnover, mail your check to you. You cash it, that's all there is." There was no answering gleam in the Judge's eye; and Cotterill added hurriedly, "Maybe the notion of a check bothers you. It does leave a trail. But cash don't. And cash can be got. There won't be any trouble about that. Nor about how much. We're responsible people. So are you. Come on, Bob; what's the answer?"

The Judge said, almost abstractedly, and entirely without heat:

"You're interesting, Jim; but you're not convincing. You see, it just happens that I don't take bribes."

Cotterill twisted in his chair as though under

a blow; and his fat face purpled with anger. He struck his fist upon the edge of the desk before him.

"All right! All right, Bob!" he cried hotly. "If you won't have it in friendship, take it the other way. You can't pull this high and mighty on me. You can't get away with it. What are you after, anyway? I haven't named a figure. You could have named your own, if you'd been reasonable. 'Stead of that, you've got to grow wings and fan 'em like an angel, or something. You can't pull that with me, Bob. I know too much."

"What do you know, Jim?" the Judge asked mildly.

Cotterill laughed. "Getting under your skin, am I? Thought I would. You think I'd go into this without making sure I had winning cards? I've looked you up, Bob. I've had you looked up. I know you, inside out. And I'll tell you flat, either you come across now, or everybody'll know you as well as we do."

"How well do you know me?" Hosmer inquired.

The attorney held up his left hand, the fingers outspread; and he ticked off his points upon these fingers. "This well," he declared. "Item one: You sat in the Steel case. When the decision was announced, the market went off. Robertson Brothers had you on their books, short a thousand shares. You made a nice little pile. Legal enough, maybe, Judge; but not right ethical. Would you say so?"

"Go on," said the Judge.

The fat little man touched another finger.

"Item two: Remember the Daily trial, down home. Chet Thorne. Remember him? Witness for the other side. You was defending Daily. He needed it, too. He was guilty as the devil. Chet told the truth, first trial. But you got a disagreement, just the same. Second trial, Chet lied. You got Daily off. Well, we've got Chet. You can't find him, but we know where he is. And we've got his affidavit to why he changed his story. Oh, it was slick! Nobody could get Chet for perjury. Change didn't amount to enough for that. But it was enough for what you needed. You got away with it then; but Chet's ready to tell how you got away with it, now."

He stopped again, and the Judge inquired: "Is that all?"

Cotterill shook his head. "Not quite. Item three: The matter of the Turner trust, and how it happened the trustee was short, and how the thing was covered up. You were the trustee, Bob. One, Two, Three, and there you have it." He struck the desk again, triumph inflaming him. "Furthermore," he cried, voice suddenly shrill. "Furthermore, the story's ready to spring. This afternoon, petition for your disbarment was filed down home. In a sealed envelop. And the whole story back of it's in type, right now, down town at the *Chronicle* office. When I leave here, before midnight tonight, I'll hit a telephone. If I say one word, the envelop goes into the fire and the type is pied. If I don't say the word, the envelop's opened in the morning, and the story's on the street in the *Chronicle* before breakfast. There's the load, Judge." He shrugged, his hands outspread.

"Look it over. Simple enough. Be good and you'll be happy. Now what do you say?"

For a long moment, there was silence in the quiet room; and when the Judge spoke, it was in a gentle, but a decisive tone.

"Nor I've never permitted myself to be blackmailed, Cotterill," he replied.

The lawyer stormed to his feet; he threw up his hands. "All right!" he cried. "Then it's bust for you."

The Judge nodded. "Maybe," he agreed. "Of course, this is old stuff. A little of it true, and a good deal of it lies. Dates back ten—twelve years. Maybe you can make it go. I don't know. But I do know one thing, Jim. I know you're a dirty specimen." There was, abruptly, a hot ring in his tones.

Cotterill cried: "That'll do! You're through. No man can talk to me that way . . ."

Hosmer's long arm shot out; his fingers twisted into the other's collar. "Talk to you? Talk to you?" he repeated quietly. "Why, Jim, I aim to do considerable more than talk to you." His right hand swung; he slapped the squirming man across the cheek. Swung and cuffed Jim Cotterill to and fro in a cold fire of rage . . .

Urged him toward the door; half dragged, half thrust, half threw him down the stairs; spurred his tumultuous exit from the house. A last stinging blow, and: "Git," he said.

Cotterill was gone.

III

The Judge's wife had come into the hall. Hosmer slowly shut the door, and he rubbed his hands as though they were soiled. There was trouble in his eyes, where the anger died.

Mary Hosmer touched his arm; asked softly: "What is it, Bob?"

He looked down at her; slowly shook his head. "Trouble, Mary," he said frankly. "He wanted to beg, or buy, or steal the Furnace case. They've raked up those old affairs. The *Chronicle* will print the whole business in the morning. He's gone to release the story now. I guess folks will walk right by and never see us, tomorrow, Mary."

Comprehension came swiftly into her eyes; she cried rebelliously: "You've lived those old tales down, Bob!" He shook his head. "Anyway," she told him, "I'm glad you—kicked him out as you did."

The Judge nodded. Then a slow smile crept into his eyes. "Matter of fact, Mary," he said, "this affair has its funny side."

"Funny?" she echoed.

"Yeah."

"Why . . ."

"I'd written my decision before he came upstairs," he explained. "I'd already decided the way he wanted me to."